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SUBJECT: CHURCH OF CYPRUS WILL HOLD ELECTIONS SEPTEMBER 24

REF: NICOSIA 642

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: Father Isaiah Kykkotis of the Kykkos Monastery updated us on June 8 on the Church of Cyprus's upcoming elections. Cyprus's bishops declared the Archbishop's throne vacant at the enlarged Orthodox synod hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Switzerland in May. They later agreed to schedule elections for September 24, bypassing current church canon that mandates elections within 40 days of a vacancy declaration. According to Isaiah, debate over the elections date has centered on whether or not to use government lists of registered voters instead of onerously preparing island-wide Church lists parish by parish. In the meantime, the campaign has started, and the Bishop of Paphos is already pledging, if elected, to fully support the GOC's Cyprus policy. The Bishop of Kykkos, for his part, is also courting the TV cameras. We expect that the bishops' political statements will increase over the summer. Cyprus's bishops will likely be stepping up their campaigns in the summer. End summary.

12. (C) Father Kykkotis noted that at the enlarged Orthodox synod hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarch and attended by the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch in Switzerland May 17-18, the bishops declared the current Archbishop of Cyprus, Chrysostomos, to be "honorably in pension." The bishops then agreed to hold elections within 40 days of the vacancy declaration (according to church canon). Upon returning to Cyprus, however, the Holy Synod determined on May 24 that this would be logistically impossible, and unanimously agreed to bend church rules in order to use government lists of registered voters. The bishops concluded that preparing new Church lists parish by parish would have been nearly impossible due to population increases since the last elections in 1977, the division of the island, and the scattering of parishioners still considered to be attached to "occupied" parishes. According to Father Kykkotis, the Synod effectively agreed to merge church voter districts with municipal districts, and the date of the first round of elections was set for September 24. The Bishop of Paphos commented to the press that waiting until September would also boost voter turnout by allowing people time to return from their vacations.

13. (C) The Bishop of Larnaca (Kition) later expressed some discontent with using the government lists, but at a meeting of the Holy Synod June 8-9, the bishops ironed out their differences and agreed to form new Church regional lists only in cases where Church information did not coincide with the state lists. In order for the Church to use the government lists, the law mandates a waiting period of two to three weeks during which time people may object to the use of their personal information. While Father Kykkotis explained that the Church hopes to include only those who intend to vote on the lists, the press characterized the Church's vetting of the government lists as "weeding out heretics and persons of a different religious persuasion." Once vetting is

completed, the three stages of elections will begin: local parishes will elect "special representatives," who next nominate a limited number of "general representatives" (or electors). Finally, the electors and the Holy Synod vote separately.

14. (C) Meanwhile, the Bishops in the running to succeed Chrysostomos are stepping up their campaigns. Last week, the Bishop of Kykkos, Nikiforos, the putative front-runner who has already printed up a glossy brochure touting his accomplishments, invited Ambassador Schlicher to join him on a visit to a bicomunal drug treatment facility. "There will be TV cameras," he observed with a wink. The firebrand Bishop of Paphos has also been hitting the stump and leaking to the press his "instrumental role" in convincing the Patriarch of Moscow to advocate for a Russian veto of a Security Council resolution in advance of the Annan Plan referenda that was seen as unfavorable to the Greek Cypriot position.

15. (C) Comment: The broadly "pro-settlement" bishops -- Kykkos, Morphou and Trimithus -- would have preferred early elections. The September date represents a modest victory for the hard-liners -- Paphos, Kition and Kyrenia. Although the Bishop of Kykkos is still considered the favorite, early polls suggest that Nikiforos and Paphos could cripple each other and open the door for the more soft-spoken and "spiritual" (by reputation) Bishop of Limassol (Athanasios). In any event, we can look forward to a long, hot summer of campaigning by the men in black. End comment.
SCHLICHER